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ROY ROGERS COMICS, Vol. 1, No. 48, December, 1961. Published monthly by Dell Publishing Co., Inc., 261 Fifth Ave., New York 16, N.Y. George T. Delacorte, Jr., President; Helen Meyer, Vice-President; Albert B. Delacorte, Vice-President. Entered as second-class matter November 13, 1951, at the Post Office at New York, N.Y., under the Act of March 3, 1879. Subscriptions in U.S.A., \$5.00 per year, single copies 35¢ each; foreign subscriptions \$6.00 per year. Canadian subscriptions \$1.38 per year. Copyright, 1951, Roy Rogers Enterprises, Printed in U.S.A. Designed and produced by Western Printing & Lithographing Co. Except those who have authorized the use of their names, horses, the stunts, scenes, characters, incidents, and illustrations reproduced or portrayed in this periodical are entirely imaginary and fictitious, and no identification with actual persons, living or dead, is intended or should be inferred. unrecd, scaner

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Roy Rogers

KING OF
THE COWBOYS

and the
RIVER of GOLD

ROY ANSWERS A CALL FROM HIS FRIEND,
CHET HOLLISTER OF THE F.B.I.

YOUR MESSAGE SOUNDED
KIND OF URGENT, CHET!
WHAT'S THE TROUBLE?

MANPOWER SHORTAGE,
ROY! MIGHTY GLAD YOU
WERE FREE TO COME!



WE HAVE AN EMERGENCY NEED FOR
A MAN LIKE YOU, WHO KNOWS OUR
METHODS---AND WHO KNOWS CATTLE-
MEN, TOO! THERE'S
A RANGE WAR
COOKING!

WHERE?

IN CALAMOSA BASIN--- BETWEEN
THE POWERFUL BIGBY SPREAD AND
A DOZEN LITTLE RANCHERS! BOTH
SIDES CHARGE UNPROVOKED
SHOOTINGS, RUSTLING, AND
RIDERS DISAPPEARING
WITHOUT TRACE!

WHESSE-BEW!
HOW LONG HAS
THIS BEEN GOING
ON, CHET?



HOW LONG? ABOUT THREE MONTHS!
EVERYTHING PEACEABLE FOR YEARS
BEFORE THAT. NO GOOD REASON
FOR THE RUCKUS---ON
THE SURFACE. MIGHT
BE A THIRD PARTY,
STIRRING UP VIOLENCE
UNDERCOVER! WE LOST
ONE MAN, LANCE
MCALL, INVESTIGATING
THAT ANGLE.

HERE'S A LETTER INTRODUCING YOU TO RANCHER
MORGAN DALY'S FAMILY! THEY'RE RELIABLE---
RELATIVES OF SHERIFF DALY.
F.B.I. AGENT LANCE MCALL
WAS STAYING WITH THEM
WHEN HE---
DISAPPEARED.

OKAY, CHET!
I'LL TAKE THE
TRAIN FOR CALAMOSA
TONIGHT---WITH
TRIGGER.



SUNSET OF THE FOLLOWING DAY FINDS BOY AND TRIGGER HEADING OUT FROM CALAMOSA, TOWARD THE DAILY RANCH...

THERE'S A RIDER STOPPED IN THE SHADOW OF THOSE TREES BELOW US, TRIGGER! TOO DARK TO SEE WHAT HE'S DOING.

HELL! HORSE SO LAINE ON YOU, MA'AM?

HE HAS A STONE WEDGED UNDER HIS SHOE! HAVE YOU A KNIFE?

MA'AM! WHEN DID HE PICK THIS STONE UP?

NOT VERY FAR BACK ON THE ROAD. BUT I'VE BEEN TRYING FOR AN HOUR TO WORK IT LOOSE WITH MY FINGERS!

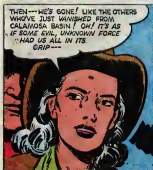
THERE IT IS---OUT! BUT YOUR HORSE WILL BE TOO LAINE TO CARRY YOU FAR, MA'AM.

MY HORSE IS TRAINED TO CARRY DOUBLE---IF YOU'D CARE TO TRUST ME! THIS IS DANGEROUS COUNTRY, I HEAR--- ESPECIALLY AFTER DARK!

YOU DON'T LOOK DANGEROUS---TO A GIRL IN DIFFICULTY! JUST WHERE WERE YOU HEADING, COWBOY?

I WAS HEADING FOR MORGAN DAILY'S PLACE. MAY I GIVE YOU A HAND UP, MA'AM?

YES! I'M LYNN DAILY---





LYNN IS SAFE NOW! THE
LETTER SERVED THE PURPOSE—
GETTING HER HEADED FOR
TOWN! THAT'S WHAT
REALLY MATTERED!

SCATTER—AND SHOOT
AT ANYTHING LOWER
THAN A RIDER! HE'S
SNEAKING AWAY
ON FOOT, BOYS!
PROBLY WOUNDED—



SHUCKS, LOUIE! IT'S TOO DARK TO SEE
A MAN CRAWLIN'!

ONE PANTHER-LIKE
LEAP CARRIES ROY
UP BEHIND THE
NIGHT RIDER...

...HUH?



ONE QUICK, ALMOST SILENT BLOW
DOES THE WORK...

WHACK!



PETE! YOU SEE
ANYTHING?

NOT A
THING!



MIMICKING THE STUNNED
MAN'S VOICE, ROY EASES HIS
ENEMY TO THIS GROUND...



OKAY, LOUIE! JUST WAIT A FEW MINUTES, AND THE BRIDGE'LL BE RUN OUT. DID YOU RUN INTO ANYTHING TONIGHT?

ONE MAN, SHOT HIM OFF HIS HORSE, BUT HE GOT AWAY IN THE DARK! WE'LL BLAME THE OTHER OUTFIT—WHICHEVER SIDE HE'S ON.

SOMETIMES I WONDER IF WE'RE BRINGING IN MEN TOO FAST, LOUIE! TOO MANY "DISAPPEARANCES" COULD RING IN THE F.B.I.

NOT IN A RANGE FEUD! THAT'S THE IDEA OF STIRRING UP A FIGHT... RANCHERS WILL FIGURE THEIR MISSING HANDS GOT COLD FEET AND QUIT.

WELL, THAT'S THE BIG SHOT'S HEADACHE—HERE COMES THE DRAWBRIDGE!

A LIGHT STEEL SPAN PROTRUDES FROM THE OPPOSITE WALL TO TOUCH THE GORGE'S RIM... ACROSS IT THE RIDERS LEAD THEIR HORSES...

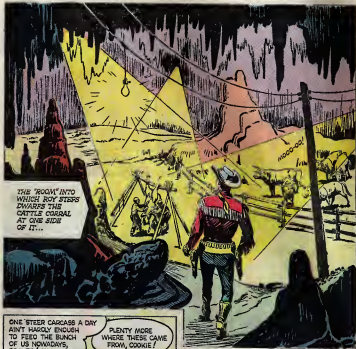
TOO LATE TO TURN BACK NOW! ANYHOW, I'VE GOT TO LEARN WHAT THIS BUNCH IS REALLY UP TO—OR DIE TRYING!

IT'S YOUR NIGHT ON GUARD DUTY BELOW, LOUIE! YOU'LL HAVE JUST ABOUT TIME TO PUT UP YOUR HORSE.

UH-HUH! I KNOW!

THEY HAVEN'T SPOTTED ME YET—BUT IT'S BETTER MOVE BEFORE THEY DO! THERE'S ANOTHER ROOM BEYOND THIS.

FARTHER ON, A DOUBLE ROW OF BOX STALLS LINES THE CAVERN... UNBADDING, ROY KEEPS HIS EYES IN SHADOW...



THE "ROOM" INTO WHICH ROY STEPS DWARFS THE CATTLE CORRAL AT ONE SIDE OF IT...

ONE STEER CARCASS A DAY AIN'T HARDLY ENOUGH TO FEED THE BUNCH OF US NOWADAYS, ROCKER! TOO MANY GOLD WASHERS!

PLENTY MORE WHERE THESE CAME FROM, COOKIE!

OUR RIDERS GOT THE WHOLE RANGE TO DRAW FROM---HEH, HEH, HEH! FER BOTH MEAT AND MEN!

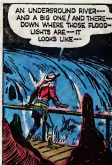
"GOLD WASHERS?" I WONDER WHO---



STAIRS---A LONG
SERIES OF THEM---
LEADING
DOWN!

NAKED ELECTRIC BULBS LIGHT A
SEEMINGLY BOTTOMLESS STAIR WELL...

THAT HEAVY ROAR I'VE BEEN
HEARING IS LOUDER DOWN
HERE! MUST BE A WATER-
FALL--- WHERE THEY GET
THEIR ELECTRIC
POWER.



AN UNDERGROUND RIVER---
AND A BIG ONE! AND THERE---
DOWN WHERE THOSE FLOOD-
LIGHTS ARE---IT
LOOKS LIKE---

... A BUNCH OF MEN RANNING GOLD UNDER GUARD!



SO THAT'S WHERE THE "WASHED" MEN
OF CALAMOSA BASIN CAME TO! SLAVE
LABOR CAMP---UNDER FREE
AMERICAN SOIL!



THERE'S AT LEAST ONE NATION
THAT SPECIALIZES IN SLAVE LABOR---
AND THAT COUNTRY NEEDS GOLD! IF ITS
AGENTS COULD SWAGGLE THE
STUFF OUT---





OH-OH!
HERE COMES TROUBLE,
I'M AFRAID!



YOU ARE LOADING ON THE
CATHALK! YOUR FACE IS
NEW! PRODUCE
IDENTIFICATION ---
QUICKLY!

IDENTIFICATION?
WHY SURE, HARDNER!
RIGHT----



—THIS!

WHAT
TH---?

BOOM!



NO USE IN YELLING---
THE NOISE OF THE RIVER
WOULD GROWL
--YOU OUT!

AMERICAN---PIG!
UGH---! YOU WILL
NEVER--- GET---
AWAY!

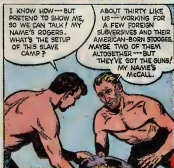
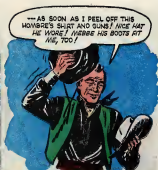


AND IT LOOKS AS IF THE STOCKY MAN'S
PREDICTION WERE RIGHT!



HUNH! THAT
SETTLES YOU---!

WHACK!





LANCE McCALL?
CHET HOLLISTER
HAS WRITTEN
YOU OFF FOR
DEAD!

--- SO HE SENT YOU
TO TAKE MY PLACE?
WE'RE AS GOOD AS
DEAD, ROGERS--- UNLESS
YOU'RE BETTER THAN ANY
OF US AT FIGURING A
WAY TO ESCAPE!



BREAK IT UP, YOU TWO! RAN
YOUR OUNCES---OR MISS YOUR
GRUB AND REST PERIOD!



THREE OUNCES BEFORE WE
REST? THIS SAND MUST BE
UNBELIEVABLY RICH.

IT IS, COWBOY---
IT IS! A RIVER
OF GOLD!



GOOD AMERICAN GOLD! AND IT'LL
BE USED, SOONER OR LATER, TO BUY
WAR MATERIALS FOR FOREIGN
SCHEMERS WHO HATE OUR INNARDS!
UNLESS--- ONE OF US CAN
ESCAPE TO TELL
THE TALE!



OKAY! THREE OUNCES! YOU
COULD DILUTE IT WITH SAND---
BUT THE SCALES WOULD
TELL THE TRUTH!



DON'T ANY OF YOU GET THE IDEA OF
MAKING A BREAK! THEY'VE GOT MACHINE
GUNS COVERING YOU FROM THAT BUILDING
ON THE WALL ABOVE!

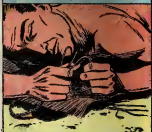
AT THE LONG SHIFT'S END, ROY IS A LITTLE SUR-
PRISED TO FIND HE HAS RAN HIS QUOTA.



UNRAVEL ALL THE STRANDS
YOU CAN FROM THESE BURLAP
BAGS, LANCE, AND PASS 'EM
TO ME---ANYHOW, SO
YOU'RE NOT CAUGHT
AT IT.

ALL RIGHT, ROY! I
DON'T THINK YOUR
PLAN WAS A CHANCE,
BUT IT'S BETTER THAN
DOING NOTHING.

NIGHT AFTER NIGHT (AS THE CAVERN'S
REST PERIODS ARE TERMED) ROY'S
HANDS ARE BUSY BRAIDING A THIN,
STRONG LINE...



TONIGHT IS THE NIGHT,
LANCE! LOUIE THE GOON
IS SLEEPY---AND TOO CON-
FIDENT TO WATCH US
CLOSELY.

YOU'LL HAVE ONLY
ONE TOS, ROY! I HOPE
YOU MAKE IT!



YAWW-AAH-HUMMMM! CURSED
NIGHT RIDING---DON'T GIVE A MAN
ANY REST---

YAWW-AAANHH!



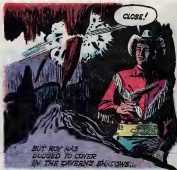
IN BREATHLESS SILENCE ROY'S
FELLOW PRISONERS WATCH...



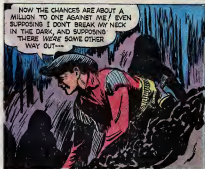
IN SILENCE, THE
THIN LOOP WICKS
UP...ABOVE THE
WALL...ABOVE
THE GUARD...







BUT ROY HAD
DODGED TO COVER
IN THE CAVERN'S SHADOWS...





UH—AM I IMAGINING THINGS?
DIDN'T KNOW I COULD BE
SPOOKED THAT FAR!
IT SURE LOOKS
REAL!



MAYBE—JUST MAYBE—
YOU'LL PROVE TO BE
MY FRIEND-IN-
NEED, OLD SON!
YOU DIDN'T COME
IN THE WAY
I DID!



YOU DIDN'T BREAK YOUR LEG COMING HERE
FOR THIS POKE OF GOLD DUST! YOU MUST
HAVE BEEN TRYING TO CLIMB OUT WITH
IT! —CLIMB TO THE PLACE WHERE
THAT COLD DRAFT COMES FROM!



YOU HAD A TORCH, MAYBE—
BUT YOU DIDN'T HAVE A ROPE, OLD
BOY! OR A GUN, EITHER! I RECKON
YOU WERE AN INDIAN WHO
LIVED HEREABOUTS.



THAT WAS A
TRICKY CLIMB—BY
CANDLELIGHT!



AGAIN ROY'S
BRAIDED ROPE
SOLVES HIS PROBLEM!

THE FRESH AIR FLOWS DOWN
THIS CHANNEL—LIKE A RIVER!
THERE'S DAYLIGHT WHERE IT
COMES FROM—OR
MOONLIGHT,
MAYBE!

AFTER LONG MINUTES OF
DIFFICULT CLIMBING...

THERE! BLESSED DAYLIGHT!
—AND MY CANDLE'S
GONE OUT!

WHEEW! I KNOW HOW A
FREED SLAVE FEELS, NOW—OR A
DEAD MAN BROUGHT TO LIFE!

MY NEXT JOB IS TO KEEP OUT
OF SIGHT OF THE GANG'S LOOK-
OUTS, AND FIND ME A HORSE
BEFORE MY FEET GROW
BUBBERS! THE QUICKER I
GET TO CAL JACOSA TOWN
THE BETTER!

MEANTIME, CALAMOSA
BASIN MOVES SWIFTLY
TOWARD OPEN WAR!
NEAR SUNDOWN, THE
TOWN'S SINGLE STREET
IS PACKED WITH GUN-
POWDER—AND THE
NEEDED SPARK
IS READY!

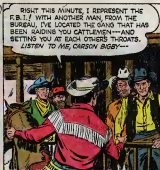
YOU CAN TURN LOOSE YOUR DOGS ANY
TIME, CARSON BISBY! THAT WAS THE
LAST STRAW—THEIR TRYING TO
SNATCH MY DAUGHTER
LAST NIGHT!

YOU'RE A LIAR, MORGAN
DAILY! NO MAN OF MINE
DID THAT—

STOP! IF YOU'RE ALL CRAZY ENOUGH
TO SHOOT ONE ANOTHER—YOU'LL
HAVE TO SHOOT ME, TOO!

LYNN! COME BACK
HERE, GIRL!

I'LL NOT BUDGE FROM BETWEEN
YOU—TILL YOU'VE KILLED ME,
OR BROKEN UP THIS INSANE
RATTLE LINE!





INTO THE DUSTY TWILIGHT RIDES THE FIGHTING STRENGTH OF CALAMOSA BASIN—WITH LYNN DAILY FOLLOWING HARD ON THEIR HEELS, UNNOTICED...



IN LESS THAN TWO HOURS, AS ROY PROMISED, THE AMAZED CATTLEMEN ARE GAZING DOWN AT THE CAVERN'S GOLD-RICH STREAM...



ALL RIGHT, MEN—THIS IS CLOSE ENOUGH! IF THOSE GUARDS SHOW FIGHT, LET 'EM HAVE IT!



YOU—GUARDS, UNDER THE FLOODLIGHTS! DROP YOUR GUNS! YOU ARE COVERED BY MANY RIFLES! DROP YOUR GUNS—NOW!



IT'S A BLUFF!

IT'S THAT COW HORSE THAT RAN OFF DOWN-RIVER...

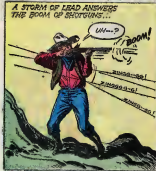
SHOOT—DOGSONE IT! WHAT ARE YOU WAITING FOR—?



A STORM OF LEAD ANSWERS THE BOOM OF SHOTGUNS...

Wh...?

BOOM!

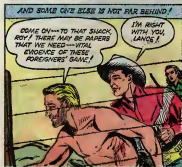
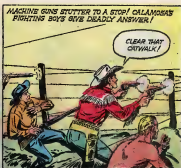


FREED PRISONERS HOWL FOR GUNS—BUT ROY SHOUTS A WARNING...

MAKE FOR THE UPPER CAVERNS, MEN! AND WATCH SHARP FOR TROUBLE ON THE WAY!

WAAAY-HOOO! FREE! WE'RE FREE! GIMME A GUN!







LANCE! LANCE!
—OH—HE'S
DYING!

LYNN?



HE'S HURT—
TERRIBLY HURT!
AND HE KEPT
RIGHT ON!

HE'S LOST BLOOD AND FAINTED—
THAT'S ALL, SO FAR AS I CAN TELL!
BUT WHAT IN THE WORLD ARE YOU
DOING HERE, LYNN?



LYNN JUST TAKING
MY—MY RIGHTFUL
PLACE, BESIDE THE
MAN I LOVE! THAT'S
WHAT I'M GOING
HERE, ROY!

UMMMMM!
I GUESSED
AS MUCH—



WELL, ROGERS, I RECKON WE'VE CLEANED OUT
THIS NEST OF SNAKES—TOOK TWO, THREE
OF 'EM ALIVE! COST US A FEW GOOD MEN
WOUNDED AND
ONE KILLED!

WE COULD HAVE LOST
MORE, BIGBY! WHERE
ARE THE BOYS WHO
WERE FORCED TO
WASH GOLD—?



THOSE BOYS? OH
THEY'RE BACK AT
THE RIVER,
STAKING OUT
FIRST CLAIMS
ON THAT FILTHY-
RICH GOLD-
BEARING
SAND.

THERE'LL BE
ENOUGH OF
IT FOR US ALL
TO CLEAN UP
BIG MONEY, I
RECKON, ROGERS!
WE'LL ALL TURN
MINER FOR A
WHILE!



NOT I, GENTLEMEN! I'VE
GOT BUSINESS BACK HOME
THAT NEEDS ME—BESIDES
A REPORT TO MAKE TO THE
F.B.I.! LANCE McCALL
WILL BE TIED UP FOR A
WHILE, I RECKON. IF
YOU'LL STEP INTO THE
OFFICE, MR. DALY,
YOU'LL SEE WHY!



MOONLIGHT OVER CALAMOSO
BASIN! IT'S A GRAND SIGHT,
TRIGGER! ESPECIALLY WHEN
WE KNOW THERE WON'T BE
ANY MORE NIGHT RIDERS TO
SPOIL IT
ALL!

Breed of the Pioneers

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It was dusk when Johnny Lund lifted his sack of groceries into the farm wagon outside Travis's store. His team stood hip-shot and weary after the long haul to town with a hundred bushels of grain. They'd be a lot tireder Johnny thought, when they got home with the empty wagon!

As he picked up the lines, a heavy "Thud!" shook the cowtown street. An explosion—somewhere! Johnny paused to look around.

Doors were opening along the street. Men were stepping out—asking questions. Outside his office, Sheriff Bill Yates stood gazing at the bank. A light burned there, showing that somebody was working late at the accounts. Suddenly the light went out!

"Something wrong there!" the sheriff shouted, starting across the street at a run. A few other men followed, drawing their six-guns. As they reached the bank building a clatter of hoofbeats sounded behind it. Gunflame winked like fireflies in the alley. Other guns answered, and a man yelled in pain.

Johnny Lund was only twelve. He had no gun, but he followed the stampede of angry citizens into the bank. Somebody was shouting "Fire!" The heavy door of the vault had fallen outward onto a pile of blankets. Johnny grabbed one blanket that was loose, and ran to beat at the flames on the floor, while

others dragged Sam Wilton, the Coshier, out of danger. Sam was tied with ropes, hand and foot!

"They broke my arm, but I wouldn't tell 'em the combination," the coshier gasped. "So they blew the door off! Took about twenty thousand dollars! Noisier job than they'd figured! I kicked the lamp over, trying to get loose . . ."

The fire was out, and Sheriff Yates was calling for riders to make a posse. Johnny Lund wished like everything that he were big enough to go. As it was, he had to sit on his wagon seat, as useless as a bump on a log, and watch the posse clatter out of town.

When their dust had settled a little, Johnny followed them, his farm team trotting slowly. It was too dark now for trailing, but the robbers would be pretty sure to head for the Badlands. And for a while they'd probably stick to the road.

When Johnny Lund reached the Big Oak at the fork of the road six miles from town, moonlight was bathing the whole country in a flood of silver. Fresh horse tracks in the dust showed that the pursuit had taken the Badlands fork, just as Johnny had figured. He turned into the Ranch fork, passing close beneath the big tree.

Behind him, some heavy objects hit the floor

of the wagon-box—one of them with a CLINK of metal. Johnny turned. The tree's dark branches were raining men and saddles!

"Keep going, Button!" a hard voice told him. "We're riding home with you—wherever that is! Maybe we'll stay with you, till that fool sheriff gets tired looking for us . . . How far 've we got to go?"

"'Bout ten miles," muttered Johnny Lund through set teeth.

Cold shivers were running up and down his backbone, at the picture of three tough outlaws coming home to frighten his Mom and Sister, and bully poor old Gramp! Somehow he'd GOT to figure a way to stop them. He hadn't a weapon of any kind. He was only a kid. But Johnny Lund was bred of pioneer stock. He'd never give up! In the next ten miles he'd be able to figure SOMETHING!



An hour later, the team moved gingerly to cross a good sized creek. In the middle, deep mud gripped their feet. They began to flounder, and Johnny began to yell, as if frightened.

"What's the matter?" asked one of the outlaws profanely.

"I missed the ford," Johnny replied. "This creek is quicksand! We got to leave the team and save ourselves!"

Cursing angrily, the three bandits waded back to the bank, followed Johnny across at another place, and plodded on in wet boots. The saddles, and several pounds of looted cash that they were carrying, grew heavier and heavier. Finally they cached their loads in an outcropping of rock.

"How much more of this blasted walking have we got, boy?" they demanded.

"Maybe three miles," Johnny told them, and led on. Just a little farther was the spot where he meant to risk everything on one desperate play. It was a so-called "mud spring," where green grass grew over a sinkhole of sticky mud. Calves, and even grown animals had been caught there from time to time—and sunk slowly out of sight . . . There it was, now, a little to the right—

Johnny paused, as if undecided.

"Reckon I'm off the trail," he said. "Just wait a minute!"

He skirted the "spring's" deceptive, grassy smoothness. On the farther side he halted, beckoning in the moonlight. "This way," he called.

The three outlaws, impatient, unsuspecting, strode toward him. Suddenly they stumbled, yelling, sinking in the bottomless mud. Johnny turned and sprinted out of pistol range, bending low to dodge the bullets that zipped above his head.

"They'll stay there!" he laughed grimly as he ran. "They won't sink out of sight until I get back with the wagon and Sis and Gramp, and pull them out with a rope! By that time, they'll be tame enough so I won't need a sheriff's posse to handle 'em, I reckon!"

CHUCKWAGON CHARLEY'S TALES

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LEN TOLLEY, Y' SEE, WAS A RANGE ORPHAN--- A SKINNY LITTLE KID WHO LIVED BY HIS WITS AND THE FEW JOBS HE COULD PICK UP. HE'D NEVER OWNED A HORSE OF HIS OWN, UNTIL---



"---ONE DAY WHEN HE WAS RIDING HOME FROM AN ERRAND ON A BORROWED HORSE, HE SAW SOMETHING MOVE AT THE BOTTOM OF A FRESH GRAVEL SLIDE.

"IT WAS A PINTO, ABOUT THREE YEARS OLD, AND HE'D BEEN THERE FOR MAYBE A COUPLE OF DAYS."

POOR FELLA!
YOU SURE GOT
CAUGHT--- BUT
YOU'RE STILL
ALIVE!



"HE FINALLY GOT THE LITTLE HORSE ON HIS FEET! THE PINTO WAS UNBRANDED--- A WILD ONE --- BUT TOO WEAK TO FIGHT."



"LEN TOWED HIM HOME AT A SLOW WALK."



THERE! YOU'LL--UH!
--- LIVE, I RECKON!
AND YOU'LL BE MINE,
PONY---ALL-- MINE!



"THE MINUTE THE ROPE WAS OFF HIS NECK THE PINTO FELL FLAT. BUT LEN BROUGHT HIM WATER AND HAND-FED HIM----"



"I'M GOING TO CALL YOU 'PATCHY' AND WE ARE GOING TO BE PARTNERS, FROM NOW ON!"

"AS SOON AS PATCHY GOT BACK ON HIS FEET, LEN WAS READY WITH A SADDLE! BUT THE WILD HORSE WASN'T SCARED ANY MORE. HE KNEW LEN MEANT HIM NOTHING BUT KINDNESS."



"EVERY MINUTE OF THE KID'S SPARE TIME WAS SPENT TRAINING THAT LITTLE STALLION--- AND PATCHY SURE LEARNED FAST."



"LEN TAUGHT HIM ALL KINDS OF TRICKS--- LIKE HOW TO CARRY HIS RIDER IN HIS TEETH, BY THE BELT."

"GETTING PAID OFF WAS AN OLD STORY TO LITTLE LEN TOLLEY."



"TIMES WERE HARD, ALL OVER THE COUNTRY, AND HARDLY ANYBODY HAD EVEN A FEW DAYS' WORK FOR A SCRAWNY KID."



"ONE DAY, JUST BEFORE FALL ROUNDOUP, LEN CAME IN SIGHT OF A SPREAD THAT SEEMED TO REACH OUT AND DRAW HIM—LIKE THE HOME THAT HE'VE NEVER KNOWN."



"HE FOUND THE OWNER DOWN AT THE CORRALS, WITH HIS SMALL DAUGHTER KATHY, WHO WAS JUST LEN'S AGE."



"I'M LEN TOLLEY, MR. CARNES. I CAN FIX FENCE, HUNT STRAYS, AND DO 'MOST ANY SORT OF CHORES--- AND PATCHY CAN'T BE BEAT AT ANY WORK I PUT HIM TO!"



"WHAT DO YOU THINK, KATHY? SHOULD WE HIRE THEM?"



"THEN YOU'RE HIRED, LEN TOLLEY--- AT TWENTY DOLLARS A MONTH AND BOARD!"



"OR! THAT'S WONDERFUL! YOU MUST TEACH MY PONY TO DO THAT!"



"FOR A COUPLE OF WEEKS, LEN REALLY EARNED HIS SALT-- --AND TRAINED KATHY'S BROWN PONY TO PERFECTION."

"I RECKON YOUR PONY IS PLUMB GENTLE AND SAFE FOR YOU TO TAKE ANYWHERE, MISS KATHY."

"I'M SURE HE IS, LEN! I'M GOING FOR A RIDE RIGHT NOW!"



"THE DAY THAT HE FINISHED THE JOB, HE SAW KATHY RIDE OFF..."

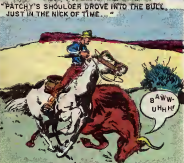
"--- AND THEN HE RODE FENCE FOR THE REST OF THE DAY. IT WASN'T ALL ACCIDENT THAT HE WENT WHERE HE MIGHT CATCH SIGHT OF KATHY CARNES."



"THE REAL ACCIDENT WAS WHEN THE BROWN PONY PUT HIS FOOT DEEP IN A PRAIRIE DOG HOLE. KATHY WAS THROWN CLEAR."



"AS KATHY GOT TO HER FEET, AN OLD RANGE BULL SPOTTED HER, AND MADE UP HIS MIND TO WIPE HER OUT! IT WAS JUST PLAIN PROVIDENCE THAT LEN TOLLEY SPOTTED HER AT THE SAME TIME."



"--- AND LEN'S ROPE-WORK BUSTED ALL THE FIGHT OUT OF THE CRITTER."



LEN TOLLEY, I RECKON DAD WILL FEEL LIKE GIVING YOU ANYTHING YOU ASK FOR--- AFTER I TELL HOW YOU SAVED MY LIFE! WHAT DO YOU WANT MOST IN ALL THE WORLD?



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